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Who Were the *Mulūk Fārs*?

Abstract: Taking a passage in al-Iṣṭakhrī as its starting point, this paper presents the Fārs rural elites called *mulūk* and *ahl al-buyūtāt*. It argues that these families were the dominant influence in the province, controlling many sources of revenue (including overseas trade routes and agricultural taxes). The main body of the paper is a study of one representative of such a family, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil al-Ḥanẓalī al-Tamīmī. His pedigree can be traced for more than four centuries, from early Islamic times to the 11th century. Finally, the paper discusses earlier scholarship on this figure, showing serious misrepresentations.

Keywords: Fārs; *malik*; *raʿīs*; *ahl al-buyūtāt*; local lordship; aristocracy; castle; taxation

Introduction

Talking about elites in pre-Mongol Iran or in other parts of the Muslim world generally means talking about military commanders, emirs, or governors, or, on the civilian side of state administration, viziers and clerks. Of these, Muslim scholars are best documented, to the point of producing the famous quote “ulemology is a noble science—at least we have to think so, because it is almost all the Islamic social history we will ever have for this period.”¹ A prominent example of this state of affairs is the recent study on Baghdadi elites in the Seljuq period.² In the context of pre-Mongol Iran, but also Iraq and Syria, the urban notables tend to be ‘*ulamā*’.³

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1 Mottahedeh 1975, 495; famously also quoted in Humphreys 1991, 187. It is worth noting the reservations about the period—Mottahedeh has in mind the 11th and 12th centuries, a little later than the focus of the present contribution.

2 van Renterghem 2015, I, 57. The author distinguishes three major fields of elite activities: religious and legal *encadrement*, government service, and economic activities (which at the end are restricted to long-distance trade). Rural elites are not covered in this work.

3 The word “notables” to indicate a group of urban elite persons was first used by Albert Hourani in his “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables”, reprinted in Hourani 1981 (first published 1968). See also Gelvin 2006.

This situation is of course due to the available source material. Whereas chronicles and other narrative histories yield information about emirs and viziers (the latter group are also the subject of source monographs), Muslim scholars profit from their own literary genre, the biographical dictionary. This has two forms, general and regional, and scholars appear in both.⁴ In certain cases, this abundant material allows complex prosopographic studies; one of the earliest was Bulliet's book on the notables—he calls them patricians—of Nishāpūr.⁵ There have been more studies of this kind, Mottahedeh on Qazwīn for example. The vast material available for Baghdad made van Renterghem's work possible.⁶ For other well-documented cities, a mix of sources has also allowed detailed studies for longer periods; the best example is Durand-Guédy's monograph on Iṣfahān.⁷

This focus means that another social group has remained largely unstudied until the present day. These are the rural aristocrats: large landowners, castellans, and so forth.⁸ They must have been there, and must have played very important roles in their provinces and sometimes on a geographically broader level, but we rarely get more than a glimpse of who they were, what they did, where they came from, how they saw their position in society, and so forth. Mostly, they are not mentioned by name—and thus prosopographic studies are out of the question—but they appear under generic identifications like *ru'asā'*, *ahl al-buyūtāt*, and so on, or are described with older Iranian terms such as *dihqān*.⁹ This plurality of terms confirms the situation sketched in the introduction to this volume: many somewhat fuzzy terms are in use for persons and groups of elite status.

There is no type of source that explicitly deals with rural aristocrats, though there is some overlap with the biographical dictionaries where rural lords appear if they were also Muslim scholars. We may conversely surmise that many scholars were landlords, but the sources do not often talk about such profane things as a man's position in society when they can instead give long lists of whose *ḥadīth* he heard and to whom he transmitted.¹⁰

4 For a recent review of the state of the art, al-Qāḍī 2009.

5 Bulliet 1972. See also Mottahedeh 1975.

6 Mottahedeh 1973.

7 Durand-Guédy 2010.

8 Paul 2016, and for the *ra'īs* as a type of rural notable, Paul 2015.

9 For this stratum of the elites, see Tafazzoli and Paul 2013. Articles from the *Encyclopedia Iranica* are quoted exclusively with reference to the online edition.

10 Cohen 1970.

Despite this, since we know that the rural lords must have been a decisive part of the upper class we should endeavor to find out more about them. There are two ways to do so. First, the extant corpus of narrative and non-narrative sources must be scrutinized and the tiny bits of information available there put together. Second, the exceptional passages where rural lords are focused upon must be identified. One of these exceptional passages can be found in al-Iṣṭakhri's geography, and it concerns the *mulūk* ("kings") of his home province, Fārs.¹¹ He also writes here of the *ahl al-buyūtāt* ("noble houses"), another type of rural lord whose position probably was one step below *mulūk* status; *mulūk* commanded greater wealth and were eligible for high offices to which *ahl al-buyūtāt* apparently had no access. It is interesting to note that the *mulūk* families were all of Arab stock whereas the *ahl al-buyūtāt* descended from Iranian nobles.

Al-Iṣṭakhri knew this province very well. The people he was writing about were active within living memory, and some of their families still held very much the same positions their ancestors had. I suspect that he included this passage in order to show that important people and families came from Fārs—the enumeration of the provincial *mulūk* is part of the province's *faḍā'il*, part of his praise of it. He may be exaggerating, but only a little; at least some of the events, persons, and families he speaks of can be identified in other sources. The passage in question does not resurface in Ibn Ḥawqal, who otherwise follows al-Iṣṭakhri closely, but nevertheless some information on these elites can also be gained from his work.¹²

In this article, I shall first give examples of the use of the term *mulūk* in sources dealing with pre-Mongol Iran, before presenting the passage in al-Iṣṭakhri in some detail, and finally turning to a case study of one of the representatives of the *mulūk Fārs*: a man called Muḥammad b. Wāṣil b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥanzalī al-Tamīmī, whose career in Fārsī politics can be followed between ca. 255 H/869 CE and ca. 262 H/876 CE. This case study includes dealing with the image of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil found in earlier scholarship. He would not necessarily warrant the detailed examination presented here, except that he is one of the rare individuals regarding whom such a study is possible. More such individuals could be identified. Here, I regard Muḥammad b. Wāṣil as a specimen of his social group—how typical a specimen must be left to future research.

11 Al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 140–144.

12 Ibn Ḥawqal 1939 and 1964.

Mulūk as a Term

Today, *malik* means “king” in Arabic. In earlier sources, the meaning is broader and the term applied to different kinds of elite persons and families. The term is used for rural secular notables (as opposed to Muslim scholars), who are large landholders, nobles, aristocrats, and/or local lords. They are more important, wealthier, and have better connections at court than the rural gentry of Iranian extraction, whom the sources more frequently call *dahāqīn*. In some ways, these noble families, the *mulūk* and the *dahāqīn*, run the province together. They are central to its administration and to a large degree manage taxation (often as tax farmers). Later, some of these families become known as the province’s *ru’asā’*.

Apart from the passage in al-Iṣṭakhrī that serves as the starting point for this contribution, a survey yields more occurrences of the term in pre-Mongol sources. A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper; what follows is a cursory summary.¹³

For pre-Islamic times, the term is used for the Persian kings (regional as well as Great Kings), but also the rulers of Rūm, India, and China. For the Arab world, it is interesting to see which groups have *mulūk*; most prominently, Kinda, but also Ḥimyar and less frequently other groups. There is also mention of *mulūk al-Yaman*, “kings of Yemen.”¹⁴ In the following passage, I will concentrate on *mulūk* from the Islamic period.

Sources from the early Islamic period have an “extensive discussion of the terms used to designate holders of authority.”¹⁵ *Malik* is only one of those terms, but one that is sometimes privileged.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī includes the biography of a singer of the Umayyad period, Ibrāhīm b. Māhān. Describing his career, al-Khaṭīb notes that Ibrāhīm met caliphs and *mulūk*.¹⁶ Since there were no independent regional “kings” in early Umayyad times, what is probably meant are extremely wealthy and well-connected landowners, and in this case not necessarily rural ones. In his version of the

¹³ I profited from Peter Verkinderen’s expertise who ran a search on my behalf in the ‘Jedli’ toolbox: <https://www.islamic-empire.uni-hamburg.de/en/publications-tools/digital-tools/downloads/jedli-toolbox.html>. The search was for *mulūk*, *mulūk al-ṭawā’if*, and *mulūk al-aṭrāf*. Peter Verkinderen’s generous help is gratefully acknowledged here.

¹⁴ In the Islamic period, some Arab groups had *mulūk*. Some of the Arab dynasties of the 10th and 11th centuries are called by this term, e. g. the Mazyadids at Ḥilla are presented as *mulūk al-asadiyya*. Al-Ḥilli 1984.

¹⁵ Marlow 2016, 113–26.

¹⁶ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 1931, 6:175.

biography of Ya‘qūb b. Layth al-Ṣaffār (r. 861–879) which also includes ‘Amr b. al-Layth, Ya‘qūb’s brother and successor (r. 879–900), Ibn Khallikān gives some details about the ‘revolt’ of Rāfi‘ b. Harthama in Khurāsān. In May 896 CE (Rabī‘ II, 283 H) Rāfi‘ sent to the neighbouring *mulūk*, asking them to help him against ‘Amr b. al-Layth.¹⁷ In this case, apart from landed properties we can suppose that these families also maintained military resources such as castles, retainers and so forth. Al-Muqaddasī has a report about the emergence of Darī (Persian) as the court language in which the main character is one of the local rulers (*mulūk Khurāsān*).¹⁸ In al-‘Utbi’s history of Maḥmūd the Ghaznavid, we also meet *mulūk Khurāsān*, and he speaks of the *mulūk Khurāsān wa-aṣḥāb al-juyūsh bihā*.¹⁹ However, Ibn Funduq Bayhaqī informs us that the province has not produced any *mulūk*, only military commanders. The author regrets that he cannot include a chapter on the province’s *mulūk*; such a chapter, in his words, is a standard feature in regional historiography.²⁰ He calls dynasties such as the Ṭāhirids and the Ṣaffārids *mulūk*. Ibn Khurdādhbih, on the other hand, has a list of *mulūk Khurāsān* together with their titles; probably pre-Islamic figures are meant and some may have survived into the early Islamic period.²¹ This also is the way the anonymous Persian *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam* uses the term.²² In the eastern provinces in particular, the regional or vassal kings can appear as *mulūk al-aṭrāf*; some of these kings are also included in Ibn Khurdādhbih’s list. Such regional dynasties are typical of these mountainous regions (now part of Afghanistan).²³

Ibn Ḥawqal offers a list of local and regional rulers in Azerbaijan and the Caucasus whom he calls collectively *mulūk al-aṭrāf*. It is interesting to note that the master of the province, Ibn Abī l-Sāj, is also called *malik*. This yields a hierarchy of local and provincial *mulūk*.²⁴ In this region, the mountainous northwest of Iran, local rulers are often called *mulūk*. This also applies also to the rulers of Daylam.²⁵

The term *mulūk al-aṭrāf* could be used for people whose rank in pre-Islamic Iran was that of *marzbān*; this is the definition found in al-Khwārazmī’s treatise

17 Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:468.

18 Al-Muqaddasī 1906, 334–5; see Marlow 2016, 68.

19 Al-‘Utbi 1424/2004, 434. In another instance, he calls the Sāmānids the *mulūk al-sharq*, “kings of the east”, 184. For the use of the title *malik* by Sāmānid rulers, see Treadwell 2003.

20 Ibn Funduq Bayhaqī 1317/1938, 65.

21 Ibn Khurdādhbih 1889, 39.

22 *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam* 1962, and Paul 1994.

23 I have discussed terms for rural notables and local ruling houses in Paul 1994, 182–183; see also Paul 2016, 113–116.

24 Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 347–348 and 354; Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 341–2 and 347.

25 One example only: al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 112.

on administrative terminology. It is also employed for the regional kings who ruled Iran whenever there was no empire.²⁶ One of the most salient later narrative patterns is that of the central government sending out messengers to the *mulūk al-aṭrāf*.²⁷

Closest to al-Iṣṭakhri in time and space is the hagiographic account of the life of Ibn Khafīf Shīrāzī. It includes a report of a man of high descent who started out on the mystic's path, after which upper-class families—*mulūk wa-ru'asā'*—of Shīrāz began offering him their daughters in marriage. The marriages took place, hundreds of them, but the man divorced the brides before consummation. Some of the girls were allowed to stay; one (a vizier's daughter) for over forty years.²⁸ In another context, this same source uses *mulūk* together with *salāṭīn*, saying that such people are in the habit of having soldiers run before them to drive the people out of the way as they ride through towns. The rider in question was 'Amr b. al-Layth the Ṣaffārid, and the setting Nishāpūr.²⁹

This term is thus not always correctly translated as “king” and not even as “ruler.”³⁰ Its meaning is broader since it includes figures and families who did not rule as royalty but were aristocrats, landholders, and very wealthy and influential persons, the top families of the upper class. Later, particularly in Seljuqid contexts, the term is mostly used for subordinate rulers who are members of the dynasty; as is well known, the term *al-sulṭān al-a'zam* was reserved for the imperial overlord, *al-sulṭān al-mu'azzam* for whoever ruled over a significant part of the imperial territory, and *malik* for a ruler on the provincial level.

In the earlier periods, however, the term sometimes is paired with *tunnā'*, “landowners.” *Tunnā'* in turn comes alongside *dahāqīn* or in other cases *tujjār* (“merchants”, and particularly those in long-distance trade). Al-Iṣṭakhri himself brings together *mulūk* and *tunnā'* when he describes their apparel and other features.³¹ Al-Muqaddasī combines *tunnā'* and *tujjār* in his description and praise of Samarqand.³² For Fārs, he mentions *tunnā'* among the notables otherwise enumerated as *mashāyikh* and *wujūh*.³³ Ibn Ḥawqal has a very interesting passage

26 Al-Khwārazmī 1895, 114.

27 Al-Sam'ānī 1963, s.v. Bishkānī, 2:249, repeated in Yāqūt 1955, same lemma, 1:428.

28 Al-Daylamī 1955, 224.

29 Al-Daylamī 1955, 10.

30 Karev 2015, 300. Karev notes that the great landholder 'Ujayf b. 'Anbasa, a representative of the new supra-regional elite forming in Transoxiana after the conquest, is introduced as *malik* in a list of “kings” who came to submit to the caliph al-Mu'taṣim.

31 Al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 138.

32 Al-Muqaddasī 1906, 278.

33 Al-Muqaddasī 1906, 430.

about fashion styles of various upper-class groups in Fārs; the *tunnā'*, he says, hold a middle course between the secretaries and the merchants *tujjār*.³⁴ This is also their place in Māfarrūkhi's ranking of social strata.³⁵

Morony describes a hierarchy within the upper class in the conquest period in Iraq. Beneath the royal family, he places the *ahl al-buyūtāt*, people descended from the noble houses of the Parthian period.³⁶ This was presumably the group best matching the *mulūk* of later centuries. Morony continues: "At the bottom of this aristocratic hierarchy were the small landed proprietors (ar. *tunnā'*, syr. *mare qorye*)."³⁷ Whereas Morony's study is based on western—Iraqi—material, de la Vaissière has studied the eastern centers of the emerging Muslim world. He describes the transition from Sogdian nobles to "the sons of Sogdian *mulūk*" and he insists on a ranking of nobility there.³⁸ David Durand-Guédy gives some details about old Iṣfahānī families in his monograph on Iṣfahān in the Seljuq period. Quoting Ibn Ḥawqal, he observes that the *dahāqīn* of pre-Islamic times were now the great *tunnā'*. Several families, he continues, were "directly connected to the Sasanian elite."³⁹

Returning to Fārs, al-Iṣṭakhri and Ibn Ḥawqal stress the continuity between pre-Islamic and Islamic times. They list a number of noble families (*ahl al-buyūtāt*, *buyūt*) who have held hereditary leading positions in the provincial administration for many generations; there is no doubt that these families were also large landholders.⁴⁰ Some had such positions still in the mid-10th century, and had therefore transmitted their rank for no less than four centuries. But they are still considered separately from the *mulūk*: they occupy an elevated rank, but it is one level below the *mulūk*.

It would be interesting to follow the idea of precise social ranking within the upper class through the early Islamic centuries, but this is beyond the scope of this contribution.⁴¹ It is however clear that the term *mulūk* is one of several used in marking social rank, and that invariably the *mulūk* occupy a place beneath the actual ruler, but above the rural gentry mostly known as the *dahāqīn*.

34 Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 289; Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 283.

35 Māfarrūkhi 1933, 87–8; English translation Durand-Guédy 2010, 28–9.

36 Pourshariati 2011, 58–9.

37 Morony 1984, 186–7.

38 de la Vaissière 2007, 33–6.

39 Durand-Guédy 2010, 29; Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 367.

40 Al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 147–148; Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 292; Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 286.

41 See Marlow 2016, 113–126 as a starting point, and also Hayes 2015.

Mulūk in al-Iṣṭakhrī: Leading Families of Fārs

In al-Iṣṭakhrī's text,⁴² various kinds of *mulūk* appear. He opens the passage stating that the province has produced many *mulūk* and first mentions (but does not enumerate) the Persian kings of pre-Islamic times. Second comes the Sasanian general Hurmuzān; he is probably included because of his major role in the early Islamic community and because he was married to a woman from the family of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.⁴³ Then al-Iṣṭakhrī names Salmān al-Fārisī,⁴⁴ to whom legend also ascribes noble birth (although not quite of the rank of a *malik*). All this history appears merely as an introduction, however. The main part of the passage is devoted to very real and very contemporary people. These families are of Arabic stock but have been living in Fārs since the early Islamic period; some of them could even have arrived on the northern shores of the sea in pre-Islamic times. It is beyond the scope of this contribution to go into details regarding all those families. After a brief introduction of the various *mulūk* families of Fārs, therefore, only one of them will be discussed at length.

The first family al-Iṣṭakhrī presents are the Āl 'Umāra, whom he says are identical with or part of the Āl al-Julandā. The family was well connected on both sides of the sea, with its Fārsī center on the coast. The Fārs branch derived its wealth and influence mainly from control of the sea passages of the Persian littoral. Their main base was the fortress of Dikdān.⁴⁵ This fortification, also known as Dākbāyāh,⁴⁶ was renowned as one of the most impregnable in the world;⁴⁷ it allowed its masters to take in the *'ushr* of all the ships that passed by. Other branches of the Āl al-Julandā were prominent on the Arab side in 'Umān, where they were for a while a ruling dynasty.⁴⁸ Al-Iṣṭakhrī links the Fārs branch to the story of Mūsā the Prophet on his quest for the Water of Life, and he tells us that the Qur'ānic verse "beyond them was a king who seized

42 Al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 140 ff. The passage has been noted by previous authors, including Spuler 1952, 434. Spuler's focus is on the preservation of the Iranian pre-Islamic culture rather than the significance of these families in the political sphere.

43 See Shahbazi. He was indeed born into a family who had the rank which Morony describes for the early *mulūk* (Morony 1984). His province was Khūzistān (with al-Ahwāz as a center), so he is not immediately from the Fārs area, but some of his fights against the Arab invaders took place next to Iṣṭakhr. See also Pourshariati 2011, 336–338.

44 On him, see Levi della Vida 2004; Levi della Vida notes that some versions see Salmān as coming from a *dihqān* background.

45 Pellat 2004.

46 Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 268; Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 272, also has *qal'a Ibn 'Umāra*.

47 Al-Mas'ūdī 1962, I, 181 (§ 501).

48 Wilkinson 1975.

every ship, unlawfully” refers to them.⁴⁹ This detail implies they held the position in question since pre-Islamic times.

We thus see a family—or rather a cluster of families or clans—of Arab descent, long resident on the Fārs coast, deriving enormous incomes from ‘taxing’ the sea trade but still able to mobilize support from inland groups as well. We are not informed of what their landholdings consisted of, but it must be supposed they were large.

Another family, the Āl Abī Zuhayr al-Madīnī, is most interesting because one of their number, Abū Sāra, ‘rebelled’ in the times of the caliph al-Ma’mūn (r. 813–833). His revolt is not dated more precisely, but it may well have been linked to the uprisings during al-Ma’mūn’s prolonged stay in the East. Abū Sāra claimed authority for himself in Fārs.⁵⁰ His rebellion had to be quelled by an army sent from Khurāsān and led by the Khurāsānī general Muḥammad b. Ash‘ath.⁵¹ An earlier representative of the family, Ja‘far b. Abī Zuhayr, led a delegation of Fārsī rural lords—the *mulūk Fārs*—to Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), who was extremely pleased and is quoted as having seen him as a potential vizier (unfortunately, he was prohibitively deaf). The Āl Abī Zuhayr controlled a strip of the coast like the Āl al-Julandā and were also landholders; one of their members owned an entire district. This particular family apparently controlled a fuller set of resources than the Āl al-Julandā, and they were well connected to the central government.⁵²

The *mulūk Fārs* were thus a group of enormously wealthy families of Arab descent with two main sources of revenue: control of long-distance overseas trade and agriculture. Regarding the latter, we can assume these families actively owned vast stretches of land. They also farmed the taxes of many districts. In some cases, their economic importance translated into political influence; they were seen as representatives of their class at the caliphal court, and even some-

49 18 (al-Kahf): 79, tr. Khalidi. *Wa-kāna warā’ahum malikun ya’khudhu kulla safīnatin ghaṣban*. “*Ghaṣban*” could also be translated by “violently”.

50 Al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 141, *yad’ū ilā nafsihi*.

51 I have been unable to identify this person. He cannot be the Abū l-Sarāyā who revolted in southern Iraq (around Kūfa) in the beginning of al-Ma’mūn’s caliphate (in 199 H/814–5 CE) because as far as I can see this revolt never spread to Fārs (al-Ṭabarī 1994, 8:528–535). This revolt was ended by Harthama b. A‘yan. On the other hand, the Muḥammad b. Ash‘ath who is said to have quelled the revolt in Fārs cannot be the Muḥammad b. Ash‘ath al-Khuzā‘ī who died during a summer raid into Anatolia in 149 H/766 CE (al-Ṭabarī 1994, 8:28). Did al-Iṣṭakhri follow oral traditions here and mix up the names of both rebel and general? Other sources date Abū Sāra to the reign of al-Manṣūr (al-Balādhuri 2000, 11:31), and this would fit the context better.

52 The information that ‘Umāra and Zuhayr came to Fārs in the ‘Abbāsīd period therefore may well be mistaken, see Oberling/Hourcade.

times rebelled against the central authorities. This seems to show that they also had some military power.

None of the local persons al-Iṣṭakhri enumerates in this passage can be found in the indexes of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr. The families likewise do not appear in the general historiography with its focus on the imperial center and its Arabocentric worldview. The man to whom the case study is devoted is an exception. In his case, the narrative in al-Iṣṭakhri can be confirmed in the universal chronicles; there is also some extra information in Ibn Ḥawqal, Ibn al-Balkhī, and Ibn Khallikān.

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil and the Descendants of ‘Urwa b. Udayya in Fārs

My case study concerns Muḥammad b. Wāṣil b. Ibrāhīm. He came from a prominent family of Arab stock who moved to Fārs in the late 7th century and settled around the provincial center of Iṣṭakhr. The family grew very wealthy over time (it is unclear how) and it may be supposed many members of it held leading positions in the province. It is not possible to establish a genealogical tree. Only a few members emerge from the sources, and only a couple of episodes are told in sufficient detail to gain an idea of the family’s social profile. It is clear, however, that they did not reside on the coast and were not as important in the overseas trade as other families; they were primarily landowners and tax farmers.

The family belonged to the Ḥanzāla branch of the Banū Tamīm and Ibn Wāṣil therefore is introduced as al-Ḥanzālī al-Tamīmī. The Banū Ḥanzāla were still present in the region in later days, but further west: Ibn al-Balkhī reports them living between Ahwāz and Baṣra and from there down to the coast. In the time under discussion here, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil’s power and landholdings were centered in the region of Iṣṭakhr.⁵³

The first members of the family whom we can trace in the sources were Khārijīs, opponents of both ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 656–661) and the Umayyad caliph Mu‘āwiya (r. 661–680) whose governor in southern Iraq, Ziyād b. Abihi, killed many out of their numbers. These included the ancestors of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil, ‘Urwa b. Udayya and his brother Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. Udayya; Abū Bilāl Mirdās, a prominent man among the Khārijīs, was killed in 61 H/680–681

53 Ibn al-Balkhī 1921, 69.

CE.⁵⁴ In the sources, Abū Bilāl is shown as a model of ascetic piety, a quietist for most of his life until his final ‘rebellion’ (*khurūj*). This *khurūj* (literally “leaving” or “going out”) drove him from Baṣra. He went to Ahwāz with a small group of followers, won an unexpected victory over an Umayyad detachment, and finally was defeated and killed next to Dārābjird, in Fārs.⁵⁵ His brother ‘Urwa does not seem to have participated in Abū Bilāl’s *khurūj*, but he was still executed in Baṣra later.

Al-Ma’mūn appointed ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm, one of this family, as leader of the maritime *ghazw* in the Persian Gulf. The target of this expedition was a group called the Qaṭariya—the real or presumed successors of a central figure in early extreme Khārijism called Qaṭarī b. al-Fujā’a, active in the last decades of the 7th century.⁵⁶ Ibn A’tam al-Kūfī details the battles against Qaṭarī, who whilst fleeing the caliphal troops followed the same route as Abū Bilāl Mirdās via Ahwāz to Dārābjird.⁵⁷ Ibn Ḥawqal links the Qaṭariya to the Ṣufriya, another extremist group of Khārijites, saying that ‘Abādān (next to the mouth of the Tigris on the Persian Gulf coast) “is a stronghold where warriors live who fight the Ṣufriya and the Qaṭariya and other pirates.”⁵⁸

The family thus either dropped their Khārijī sympathies in the early 9th century or followed a quietist form of Khārijism as their ancestors had done. The campaign is presented very much as a family enterprise: it was equipped (and apparently at least partly paid for) by another family member, Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. ‘Umar, son of that ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm who led the enterprise. As this Mirdās was called by his *kunya* Abū Bilāl, the name Abū Bilāl Mirdās resurfaced; a reminder that in such genealogically conscious families, names were passed on.

The family was extremely wealthy, evident in the fact that it could muster the funds for such a campaign. Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. ‘Umar was charged a *kharāj* or annual land tax of roughly three million dirham. His relative Muḥam-

54 He even has an entry in the *El²*: Levi della Vida 1993. Levi della Vida completes the genealogy in pre-Islamic times: the Arab tribal group was Rabī’a b. Ḥanzala b. Mālik b. Zayd Manāt, also called Rabī’a al-wustā. Mirdās was descended from Ḥudayr b. ‘Amr b. ‘Abd b. Ka’b; Udayya was the name of his mother or grandmother. He was mostly known by his *kunya* Abū Bilāl.

55 Hagemann 2016, 41–42. The narrative of this *khurūj* also appears in Levi della Vida 1993. For the figure of Abū Bilāl, see also Gaiser 2014. Both Hagemann and Gaiser do not aim at reconstructing the events, but concentrate on the narrative itself.

56 Van Ess 1992, 573, 613.

57 Al-Kūfī 1392/1972, 1–41. No Ḥanzala appear in this narrative.

58 Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 48: *kāna fihi al-muḥāribūn li-l-Ṣufriya wa-l-Qaṭariya wa-ghayrihim min multaṣṣa al-baḥr*. Van Ess 1992 does not list a group called the Qaṭariya but has much information on the Ṣufriya.

mad b. Wāṣil had to pay about the same sum.⁵⁹ In total the family's members owed a sum of 10 million dirham to the state. (To put this in perspective, the entire province was good for about 30 million dirham.⁶⁰) The sum probably means that the family was engaged in tax farming, so that the amount stated was not due merely from their own landholdings but was the sum total they had to deliver to the caliphal administration. On the other hand, al-Iṣṭakhrī explicitly says they owned many villages. For their administration, they may have employed Iranian experts, at least in earlier periods; we hear of a man of *dihqān* extraction who managed Ḥanzalī holdings in Fārs and was himself a client of the Ḥanzāla.⁶¹

Another asset which made the Ḥanzalī family influential was their control of castles. Castles were a necessary feature of local lordship. As mentioned above, the Āl al-Julandā held the castle of Dikdān on the coast. Muḥammad b. Wāṣil acquired at least one castle in the region of Iṣṭakhr, next to Rāmjird, called Saʿīdābād. This was an old fortress, as Ibn Ḥawqal tells us. It had been in use in Sasanian times and in the early Islamic period it had served as a stronghold for the governor Ziyād b. Abiḥi (who killed so many Khārijites, among them the two ancestors of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil). Muḥammad b. Wāṣil ordered it demolish-

59 Al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 142.

60 Ibn Khurdādhbih 1889, 48, who adds that in pre-Islamic times the state took 40 million from the province. For the year 350 H/961 CE, Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 299 and Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 304 gives 1.5 million dinar (the exchange rate between silver dirham and gold dinar is a matter of dispute; the figures presented here would make a rate of 20 dirham to the dinar probable). Ibn Ḥawqal's figures may point to an organized financial bureaucracy; these were the times of 'Aḩud al-Dawla the Būyid (338–372 H/949–983 CE). Compare this to the 15 million dirham which Ya'qūb b. al-Layth (in 255 H/869 CE) reportedly offered to get the caliphal administration from the taxes of Fārs if he were appointed over the province; Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:447. When Ya'qūb came to Fārs again in or around 260 H/873–4 CE and was able to administer the taxes in a regular way, he got the 30 million that seem to have been the norm in this period. He had his representative in Fārs, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil, send only five million on to the caliphal administration (Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:453). The same source mentions that the Ṣaffār had an appointment for a number of provinces (including Khurāsān, but also Fārs) on condition that he deliver two-thirds of the taxes he collected. In that case, the caliphal court would have expected around 20 million dirham from Fārs. Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:462. For more figures relating to the taxes due from Fārs, see Spuler 1952, 468–469.

61 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghhdādi 1931, 6:175, no. 3231. One member of the family of the singer Ibrāhīm b. Māhān is quoted as saying *kānat fī aydinā ḩiyā' li-ba'ḩ al-Ḥanzaliyīn*. There is a problem here, however. Ibn al-Nadīm puts it differently. He has the family come from Arrajān (in western Fārs, where Muḥammad b. Wāṣil's family is not attested), and says they fled from there in the Umayyad period because of unjust tax collectors. Ibn al-Nadīm also has them as clients of the Ḥanzāla, *mawāliyunā [min] al-Ḥanzaliyīn, wa-kānat lahum ḩiyā' indanā*, which does not necessarily mean that the Iranian family managed these estates. Ibn al-Nadīm n.d., 157.

ed, only to later have it rebuilt.⁶² He then kept his treasure there—we learn that because it was carried off when Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth the Ṣaffār conquered the castle. The place was later used as prison.

It is not stated which castle or castles the family had before Muḥammad b. Wāṣil took over Sa‘idābād, but we can suppose that all branches of the Ḥanẓala in Fārs had such strongholds. Al-Iṣṭakhrī speaks of 5,000 castles in Fārs, a figure Ibn Ḥawqal repeats; this figure refers to the fortresses in the mountains and similar places that were close to settlements but not an integral part of them. Citadels and urban fortifications come on top of that.⁶³ It is interesting to note that Ibn Ḥawqal quotes a man of the *tumnā*’ group as his source: evidently that is who was knowledgeable in such matters—probably because they owned such places themselves.

There can be no doubt that the Ḥanẓalī family was one of the pillars of ‘Ab-bāsīd power in Fārs, together with the other noble houses of the *mulūk* and the *ahl al-buyūtāt*.

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil’s ‘Rebellion’

In the mid-9th century, the caliphal administration weakened and troops of military slaves dominated the new capital of Sāmarrā’. The most striking single event, remembered because it ushered in a long period of ‘anarchy’ in Sāmarrā’, was the assassination of al-Mutawakkil in 247 H/861 CE.⁶⁴

For some time, the caliphs had been ruling large parts of Iran including Fārs through a hereditary line of super-governors, the Ṭāhirids. From the perspective of Fārs, the Ṭāhirids were overlords, but also always—at least formally—agents of the caliphal central administration. In this time of instability in Fārs, the main actors were representatives of the Ṭāhirids and Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth the Ṣaffār as external powers on the one hand, and regional figures on the other.

What was at stake was evidently the tax revenue from Fārs, money of increasing importance for Sāmarrā’: Iraq had become problematic to tax, and not much could be expected from Khurāsān any longer. To give an example: in Muḥarram 256 H/early December 9, 869 CE, ten million dirham and a half

⁶² Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 268, Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 272–273.

⁶³ Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 268, Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 272. Ibn al-Balkhī mentions more than 70 castles conquered and then destroyed by the Seljuqid governor Chawli, and he specifically enumerates only those which were not in this number. Therefore, it is not completely surprising that Sa‘idābād is not mentioned. Ibn al-Balkhī 1921, 158.

⁶⁴ Kennedy 2016, 147.

in tax payments arrived in Sāmarrā' from Fārs.⁶⁵ This money allowed a clique of military slaves to pursue an action against al-Muhtadī (r. 869–70) that they had been forced to postpone for lack of funds. Some kind of tax administration was still at work in the province.

Until 255 H/869 CE, a man called 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Quraysh intermittently controlled Fārs.⁶⁶ At some times he had a caliphal appointment and at others he rebelled against the official representative of Ṭāhirid and caliphal power. The exact details of the struggle in the 250s H/860s CE between the Ṭāhirids, the Ṣaffār (the rising power in the east), and local actors like 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn need not detain us here. According to al-Ṭabarī (at the beginning of the story of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil), the Ṭāhirid representative in Fārs was Ḥārith b. Simā. Muḥammad b. Wāṣil and a Kurdish emir called Aḥmad b. al-Layth rose against Ḥārith b. Simā and killed him in 256 H/870 CE.⁶⁷

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil in Power

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil controlled Fārs from 256–261 H/870–875 CE. But he always accepted an overlord's authority, either that of the caliph or Ya'qūb b. al-Layth or both. Ibn Khallikān calls him the governor of Fārs, in charge of finances and war at the same time; this may go back to an agreement between the caliph and Ya'qūb. Al-Ṭabarī also says Ibn Wāṣil submitted to the Ṣaffār; when Ya'qūb insisted that he hand over the province to a representative of the caliph, this was done in 258 H/872 CE.⁶⁸

The *Tārīkh-i Sistān* has Ya'qūb come to Kirmān at the beginning of al-Mu'tamid's caliphate (r. 256–279 H/870–892 CE). Muḥammad b. Wāṣil met him with his army and offered submission and obedience together with presents and much wealth.⁶⁹ This presupposes that Ibn Wāṣil had been in control of Fārs for some time, so the event should probably be dated to 257 H/870–871 CE. In return, the source continues, Ya'qūb gave him Fārs. Ibn Wāṣil also sent some

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:221.

⁶⁶ Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:447–450.

⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:474 (III:1839 in de Goeje's edition); Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:240.

⁶⁸ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:490 (III: 1859); Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:257.

⁶⁹ *Tārīkh-i Sistān* 1314/1935 216; *Istoriia Sistana* 1974, 216, with note 638 which repeats Smirnova's note 543.

tax monies to the caliphal court at that time.⁷⁰ He had his own tax agents (*bundār*): these men were later remembered as having worked for him.⁷¹

In 258 H/871–872 CE, Ibn Wāṣil returned to the caliphal *ṭā'a* (obedience); that is, he formally submitted to the caliph—he had been obedient before, but then rebelled. At the same time, he accepted a new caliphal agent, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Fayyāḍ, as responsible for the finances (*al-kharāj wa-l-ḍiyā'*) of Fārs.⁷² This agent is not mentioned again. There is no information regarding what his appointment meant for the holder of the corresponding military position (*al-ḥarb*): in some cases, one man held both positions, but they also sometimes devolved onto two appointees.

Some years later, in 261 H/874–875 CE, Ibn Wāṣil defeated a caliphal force sent against him. The commander of this caliphal force was 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muflīḥ and his second-in-command was Tāshtimur. In the battle, Tāshtimur was killed and 'Abd al-Raḥmān taken prisoner. Ibn Wāṣil refused to negotiate his liberation, and Ibn Muflīḥ died in captivity.⁷³ Muḥammad b. Wāṣil now was master of the province again, and he expanded into neighboring provinces such as Khūzistān. It was from there that he hastened east to meet Ya'qūb b. al-Layth, only to be defeated at al-Bayḍā' (see below).

At some point, Ibn Wāṣil had the ruined fortress of Sa'īdābād (Rāmjird, district Iṣṭakhr) repaired, and tried to put down local resistance by conquering other fortresses held by recalcitrant local lords. But he had trouble taking some of them: Al-Iṣṭakhrī (and Ibn Ḥawqal following him) specifically name the fortress of Kāriyān in the Tin mountains—he could not break the resistance of the castellan there, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Azdī.⁷⁴

In general, however, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil seemed well established. His relationship with the caliph was troubled, but he must have been followed by a majority of the local lords and castellans. He had his own agents, including taxation specialists, working for him. He delivered some of the taxes produced to the caliphal court, if irregularly. The caliph could not remove him—an attempt to do so

⁷⁰ Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:453. The sum quoted is five million dirham; Ya'qūb had taken the (usual) thirty million at the same time. See above, note 60.

⁷¹ In their list of old families who produced able administrators, al-Iṣṭakhrī and Ibn Ḥawqal quote the Marzbān b. Zādbih family (judging by the name, of *dihqān* stock). Al-Ḥasan b. Marzbān worked as *bundār* for Muḥammad b. Wāṣil and later for Ya'qūb b. al-Layth; Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 286; Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 292; al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 147.

⁷² Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:490 (III:1859); Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:257.

⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:513; Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:275. Both commanders participated in earlier campaigns against the Zanj.

⁷⁴ Al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 116; Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 269/Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 272. It is not stated whether old grudges between Azd and Tamim played a role here.

had failed, and most of the caliphal military and financial resources were now directed against the Zanj who were clearly the more dangerous threat.⁷⁵ The geographer al-Iṣṭakhrī, a regional source, calls Ibn Wāṣil “governor” of Fārs (*wāli*), and probably he reflects local feelings.⁷⁶ And as we have seen, all the other sources see Ibn Wāṣil as the legitimate governor of Fārs as well, at least up to a point.

Reasons for ‘Rebellion’

In order to understand the reasons for this movement, we turn to a story told only in al-Iṣṭakhrī. A group of Turkish military slaves, reportedly forty officers, were given land grants (*iqṭāʿ*) in Fārs, or at any rate they went there and claimed they had. Their commander-in-chief, whom al-Iṣṭakhrī calls al-Muwallad and who therefore was probably the noted slave general Muḥammad b. al-Muwallad,⁷⁷ tried to prevent abuse, and therefore his subordinates rebelled against him. He sought refuge with Mirdās b. ʿUmar, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil’s paternal cousin. Abū Bilāl Mirdās gave shelter and asylum to al-Muwallad and saw to it that he made his way back to Baghdad. With al-Muwallad gone, the Turkish officers elected another leader—Ibrāhīm b. Sīmā, apparently the brother of that Ḥārith b. Sīmā whom Ibn Wāṣil is reported to have killed.⁷⁸

The caliphal administration now asked Mirdās to pursue and to punish the Turks, whom they wanted killed; however, Mirdās excused himself. The caliph then addressed the same request to Muḥammad b. Wāṣil, and Ibn Wāṣil indeed took action by executing almost all forty Turkish officers. Only Ibrāhīm b. Sīmā

75 Their revolt lasted from 255–270 H/869–883 CE. Popovic 2002.

76 Al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 116; Ibn Ḥawqal 1964, 269; Ibn Ḥawqal 1939, 273: *kāna Muḥammad b. Wāṣil al-Ḥanzalī wāli Fārs yalīhā ḥarban wa-kharājan*; note the explicit mention of both financial and military matters.

77 Al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 142. This man led military action against the Zanj in Baṣra in late 257 H/871 CE. In Rabiʿ I, 259 H/January 873 CE, he was appointed to lead the war against the Zanj in the region of Wāsiṭ. In 261 H/874–875 CE, when Yaʿqūb defeated Muḥammad b. Wāṣil, he was not in the Fārs region either. In later years, e. g. in 264 H/877–878 CE, he was still busy fighting the Zanj as military commander of Wāsiṭ. Thus his presence in Fārs is not documented for the relevant years in al-Ṭabarī. Later, he defected to the Ṣaffārid army.

78 Ibrāhīm b. Sīmā is also a known commander. In 257 H/871 CE, he fought the Zanj west of Ahwāz, and al-Ṭabarī explains that he “retreated from Fārs where he had been together with al-Ḥārith b. Sīmā in the field/steppe known as the Arbuk steppe, this is between al-Ahwāz and the bridge” (al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:479). In the following years, Ibrāhīm was also involved in the wars against the Zanj. He was killed in the battle of Dayr ʿĀqūl (otherwise a victory for the caliphal troops) in Rajab 262 H/April 876 CE.

and a handful more escaped. Subsequently Muḥammad b. Wāṣil took over in Fārs.

If we consider that the report of the killing of Ḥārith b. Sīmā is not in al-Iṣṭakhri and the story of the killing of the Turkish officers is not in al-Ṭabarī, we may ask whether both stories could refer to the same chain of events. Al-Ṭabarī shows Ibrāhīm b. Sīma, who escaped the massacre, as coming to Ahwāz “retreating from Fārs where he had been with al-Ḥārith b. Sīmā” in 257 H/871 CE.⁷⁹ If the killing had taken place just a bit earlier, it can be dated to 256 H/870 CE, the year al-Ṭabarī reports the killing of al-Ḥārith and Ibn Wāṣil’s usurpation of Fārs. This date also works well with reports in other sources. Al-Iṣṭakhri’s report is biased: the killing took place on caliphal orders, so it cannot be laid at Ibn Wāṣil’s door.

The sources do not give any reason for Ibn Wāṣil’s action; they put it into the general basket of insubordination and rebellion. Clues can be obtained (with caution) from the timing of the uprising. Al-Iṣṭakhri explicitly links the killing of the military slaves in Fārs to two factors: firstly, the breakdown of central authority, and secondly, the greed (“injustice”) of the Turks who held *iqṭā’āt*. When they came to Fārs they apparently tried to seize both money and goods. This encroached on the traditional rights of the established upper rung of the landed elites in several ways. They were no longer the direct partner of the central administration. They could no longer make a profit themselves out of tax farming. They probably had to disburse taxes and tax arrears in unprecedented amounts. And they had to confront a group of people who were quite prepared to use violence to get what they wanted. Taken together, these reasons were enough to make the provincial nobility think of rebellion and therefore it is unlikely that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil acted only for his own sake.

The End

The end came quickly. Again according to al-Iṣṭakhri,⁸⁰ Ya’qūb the Ṣaffār was called in—not by the caliph, but by Mirdās, Ibn Wāṣil’s cousin, who feared for his life if Ibn Wāṣil were to continue. Ya’qūb invaded Fārs in Shawwāl 261 H/July 875 CE, and in the ensuing battle near Bayḍā’ in the region of Iṣṭakhr Ibn

⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:479–480. There is no explanation of why and fearing whom Ibrāhīm should have “retreated” from Fārs.

⁸⁰ According to the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, an erstwhile Ṣaffārid commander, Muḥammad b. Zaydayh, enticed Muḥammad b. Wāṣil to rise against Ya’qūb. *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* 1314/1935, 226; *Istoriia Sīstana* 224.

Wāṣil was defeated. Ya‘qūb also took his fortress or fortresses. The booty was enormous—40 million dirham⁸¹—and according to al-Ṭabarī Ya‘qūb took Ibn Wāṣil’s maternal uncle Mirdās prisoner.⁸² There is a difficulty here: al-Iṣṭakhri sees Mirdās as Ibn Wāṣil’s paternal cousin, and in an entirely different role. Ibn al-Athīr adds to the confusion over this man, whom he sees as conducting negotiations between Ya‘qūb and Ibn Wāṣil.⁸³ In his version, when Ya‘qūb entered Fārs, Ibn Wāṣil was in the region of Ahwāz west of his home country. He sent his maternal uncle (*khāl*) Abū Bilāl Mirdās to negotiate with Ya‘qūb, and as a result Abū Bilāl tendered Ibn Wāṣil’s submission. This was not what Ibn Wāṣil had intended, and when Abū Bilāl came back he had him imprisoned together with Ya‘qūb’s emissaries. Battle thus became inevitable. Ibn Wāṣil had lost many men, foot soldiers as well as cavalry, from hunger and thirst. Just as the fighting started, Ya‘qūb said to Abū Bilāl (whom the account does not previously mention as freed): “Ibn Wāṣil has betrayed us.” Ibn Wāṣil’s men then fled without doing battle.⁸⁴

Besides these accounts of the war and battle between Ya‘qūb and Ibn Wāṣil, there is the material found in the *Tārīkh-i Sistān*. The *Tārīkh-i Sistān* underlines Ya‘qūb’s resourcefulness; Ya‘qūb wins because he outwits Ibn Wāṣil.⁸⁵ Its end sees Muḥammad b. Wāṣil locked up in a fortress and Ya‘qūb proceeding to Ahwāz accompanied by Abū Mu‘ādh Bilāl b. al-Azhar.⁸⁶ One would like to know whether there is any link between this Bilāl and Abū Bilāl Mirdās, but that cannot be established and would seem unlikely at first glance because of the *nasab* of Abū Mu‘ādh.⁸⁷

81 In comparison, Ya‘qūb is said to have left at his death the fantastic sum of four million dinar (in gold, *‘ayn*) and fifty million dirham (silver, *waraq*), not counting equipment and so forth. Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:462. The rendition of the fortress is also related in the *Tārīkh-i Sistān*, and there is a much embellished story regarding how Muḥammad b. Wāṣil finally unveiled the secret of how to get into it. *Tārīkh-i Sistān* 1314/1935, 229–230; *Istoriia Sistana* 1974, 226–227.

82 Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:514 (III:1888).

83 This dilemma has been noted by Bosworth already, and I am unable to offer a solution. Bosworth 1994, 151.

84 Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:276–277.

85 The prototypical *‘ayyār*, Ya‘qūb is often shown outwitting his enemies; see Tor 2007. It is therefore no wonder that later authors relate further stories about Ya‘qūb duping Muḥammad b. Wāṣil. One of those is in al-‘Awfi 1393/2015, 195–196. In the subsequent anecdote (196–198), the lord of Dīnawar in his turn bests Muḥammad b. Wāṣil. In the India of the 13th century, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil was still remembered as a bit dumb and no match for the Ṣaffār (or even for ordinary local lords). My thanks to Peter Verkinderen for the reference to al-‘Awfi.

86 *Tārīkh-i Sistān* 1314/1935, 226–230, *Istoriia Sistana* 1974, 223–227.

87 This man’s career can be followed to some extent in the *Tārīkh-i Sistān*. (He is, however, unknown to the central chronicles.) He ruled Fārs on behalf of ‘Amr b. al-Layth in 274 H/887 CE

After the battle at Baydā', Ibn Wāṣil's troops dispersed. According to al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Wāṣil escaped into the mountains. After a short while, the political wind changed again. In the question which continued to occupy policy makers at the caliphal court, namely whom to appoint over the eastern provinces, the Ṣaffār or one of the Ṭāhirids, the pendulum swung again—this time in favour of the Ṭāhirids. Ya'qūb had been beaten at Dayr 'Āqūl on Rajab 9, 262 H (April 8, 876 CE),⁸⁸ and though the defeat was not a catastrophic one it did much to harm Ya'qūb's reputation as a military leader. Ya'qūb was once more publicly cursed, and the caliph appointed Ibn Wāṣil to rule Fārs.⁸⁹ But according to the same source, in that year Ya'qūb regained control of Fārs and Ibn Wāṣil fled. The following year, in 263 H/876–877 CE, one of Ya'qūb's commanders succeeded in taking him prisoner.⁹⁰ Perhaps al-Iṣṭakhri's report about Ibn Wāṣil's imprisonment should be related to this second occasion: Ibn Wāṣil was taken prisoner either immediately after the battle at Baydā' or shortly after. He was brought to Sīrāf and later handed over to Ya'qūb who transferred him to Thamm, another fortress. Ibn Wāṣil spent two years in this fortress. For a short while, when Ya'qūb was in Jundayshāpūr, Ibn Wāṣil was able to get free and take over the fortification; but Ya'qūb soon sent orders to kill him.⁹¹ No source gives a death date for Ibn Wāṣil.

Later History

The end of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil did not mean that his family had lost all influence. When the Būyid 'Alī b. Būya ('Imād al-Dawla) conquered Shīrāz in 322 H/934 CE, the resulting taxes (or tax arrears) were farmed out. Three local land-

(*Tārīkh-i Sīstān* 1314/1935, 247, *Istoriia Sistana* 1974, 239); he is said to have accomplished his task there well. He continued in Fārs but was employed also on campaigns elsewhere. At the end, perhaps in 291 H/904 CE, he was ordered to go into exile in Sīstān; he gathered "his belongings, his people, and set in march his slaves and his warriors and everyone who was beholden to him and had them depart for Sīstān" (*māl wa-ahl-i khwīsh bar girift wa-ghulāmān wa-sipāh-i khwīsh harchi khāṣṣ-i ū būd wa-rāh-i Sīstān bar girift*), *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* 1314/1935, 275, *Istoriia Sistana* 1974, 263. But he was intercepted by Ṣaffārid forces and imprisoned in Muḥammad b. Wāṣil's fortress. If by any chance he was a member of the Ḥanzālī clan, this would be ironic indeed. It seems clear that he was a Fārsī nobleman, and even if he was not Abū Bilāl Mirdās' son, he might still belong to the larger family.

⁸⁸ Bosworth, "Dayral-'Āqūl."

⁸⁹ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:519.

⁹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:530.

⁹¹ Al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 143–144.

holders are named explicitly among those who took the contracts, among them an Ibn Mirdās. There can be no doubt that this is a member of the Ḥanzālī family.⁹²

Ibn al-Balkhī speaks of a family of *qāḍīs* in Fārs who were admired for both their knowledge in legal affairs and for their long-lasting influence. The first man whom he mentions is Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Sulaymān b. Abī Burda al-Fazārī, dated to the times of the caliph al-Rāḍī (r. 322–329 H/934–940 CE).⁹³ Abū Muḥammad’s descendants spread into Kirmān and Fārs, acquiring positions and landed property as far afield as Ghazna. At some point, his son Abū Naṣr (who apparently stayed in Fārs) got married to a girl from the Mirdāsiyān *ra’īs* (this word probably meaning wealthy landowners, well connected, with a potential for high positions in the provincial administration; as mentioned above, *ra’īs* is a term which continues an association with *malik* in some contexts).⁹⁴

As a consequence, their son ‘Abdallāh held both positions: he was *qāḍī* as a legacy from his father and he inherited the *riyāsa* from his mother’s family.⁹⁵ It cannot be shown definitely that the Mirdāsiyān in Ibn al-Balkhī are the descendants of Abū Bilāl Mirdās—whether the early Khārijite or the later *malik*—but it is highly probable. Mirdās is not a frequent name and there is no other candidate for an eponym of any Mirdāsiyān as a *ra’īs* family in Fārs. The descendants of this ‘Abdallāh were in turn highly respected in their offices, both the *qaḍā’* and the *riyāsa*, and Ibn al-Balkhī proudly informs his readers that his grandfather had the privilege of working with one of them in the beginning of the Jalālī era (the reign of the Seljuqid sultan Malikshāh, 1072–1092).⁹⁶ This would give the Fazārī/Mirdāsī family of *qāḍīs* and *ru’asā’* an active timespan of over a century. If we include this period, the Ḥanzālī *mulūk* of Fārs have a historical record of four centuries and a half, ranging from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the mid-7th century to the reign of Malikshāh in the late 11th.

⁹² Ibn Miskawayh 1916, 300. The other two were al-Nawbandajānī and a member of the Fasānjus clan.

⁹³ I have been unable to identify this person.

⁹⁴ This *kunya* is the only part of the name Ibn al-Balkhī quotes, and therefore it is impossible to find out more about him.

⁹⁵ Ibn al-Balkhī 1921, 117–118. *Pas qaḍā’-i Fārs ba-mirāth-i pidar wa riyāsat-i ān wilāyat ba-mirāth-i khānadān-i mādar badū rasīd.*

⁹⁶ Ibn al-Balkhī 1921, 118. It is known that Ibn al-Balkhī’s grandfather was a *mustawfī* under various rulers in the late 11th century; see Bosworth, “Ebn al-Balkī.”

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil as One of the *Mulūk Fārs*

We have seen that al-Iṣṭakhrī's *mulūk Fārs* were the top level of the provincial landholding elite, enormously wealthy, politically influential, and eligible for high offices. The Ḥanḏalī family to whom Muḥammad b. Wāṣil belonged was one of several, but it seems that Ibn Wāṣil himself was an exceptional figure.

Even if the narratives in the various sources seem to defy attempts at reconstructing the chain of events, some points are clear on the level of social history. First, it is clear where Muḥammad b. Wāṣil got his financial resources. His entire family had huge landholdings and they were possibly also involved in tax farming, although there is no clear indication of the latter in the sources. His military resources included control over at least one castle (which he had repaired while he was in power), and probably other places too.

But military resources also mean military manpower. Here the sources are less forthcoming. In his action against the Turks from Sāmarrā' whom he had killed on caliphal orders (as al-Iṣṭakhrī claims), he relied on his personal retainers, a group of people whom al-Iṣṭakhrī introduces as *ḥāshiyatuhu wa-ahl ṭā'atihi*.⁹⁷ It is interesting to see that a figure like Muḥammad b. Wāṣil had men in his *ṭā'a*, his obedience, a term normally used to indicate those serving and obeying rulers. The *ḥāshiya* may have been something like household troops, people personally dependent on Muḥammad b. Wāṣil as their lord, whereas the *ahl ṭā'atihi* could correspond to a larger group of supporters and people who followed him for the time being. In the *Tārīkh-i Sistān*, it is taken for granted that Ibn Wāṣil had his own troops, though we do not learn who they were. In Ibn al-Athīr's report on the events leading to the battle at al-Bayḏā' between Ibn Wāṣil and Ya'qūb the Ṣaffār, infantry and cavalry troops are mentioned in Ibn Wāṣil's army; this might point to an ancient type of mobilization with a comparatively high proportion of drafted followers of local lords fighting on foot.

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil is also reported to have mustered Bedouin troops in Fārs, from Tamīm (the source mentions they were from his tribal group), and from 'Abd Qays in Baḥrayn. Both groups had sent ill-equipped and ragged men.⁹⁸ Since this information comes from a contemporary source, two points are interesting: first, it is taken for granted that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil has a military following, and second, his rule extends as far as Baḥrayn.

⁹⁷ Al-Iṣṭakhrī 1870, 142. See also the description of Bilāl b. al-Azhar's following when he left Fārs for Sistān, above, note 88.

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1939, 407. I owe this reference to Peter Verkinderen.

Another important asset were allies, political resources that could be turned into military ones in case of need. Groups the sources identify as Kurds appear as allies of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil (and of other local lords as well). One of the relevant Kurdish lords was Aḥmad b. al-Layth (no relation of the Ṣaffārids, of course). Whereas Ibn Khallikān shows this man as Ya‘qūb’s most important enemy and as an ally of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Quraysh in the conquest of Fārs,⁹⁹ he appears as Muḥammad b. Wāṣil’s accomplice in the uprising against Ḥārith b. Sīmā in al-Ṭabarī.¹⁰⁰ Apparently in both cases Kurdish fighters were seen as a necessary but problematic factor in military action in Fārs; they were always pillaging and raping, and their loyalties were shaky. Still, Muḥammad b. Wāṣil must have made use of Kurdish forces repeatedly since after his defeat Ya‘qūb cracked down on a Kurdish group, the men of Mūsā b. Mihrān, for sympathizing with Ibn Wāṣil. Probably some out of their numbers had participated in Ibn Wāṣil’s campaigns.¹⁰¹

Apart from the Kurdish lords, what about the Iranian or Arab local lords, including the families of the *mulūk Fārs*? Here, we have no information besides the anecdote that one of them refused to join Muḥammad b. Wāṣil who therefore laid siege to his castle—without, however, managing to take it. It is tempting to conjecture that many others did in fact join Ibn Wāṣil, but this is clearly stated nowhere.

After his initial successes, Ibn Wāṣil may have pursued the goal he achieved at the end: to be appointed as governor of Fārs. It seems that he also was Ya‘qūb’s man in that province; at any rate, he was prepared to serve the Ṣaffār as well as the caliph. The Ṭāhirids were no longer part of the game in any practical way as far as Fārs was concerned. Ibn Wāṣil was one of those who aspired to positions of leadership in their own province. The sources are silent about who he may have had in mind as a role model (if anyone), but perhaps it is no coincidence that al-Iṣṭakhri makes some comments about the Sāmānids immediately after his passage on Ibn Wāṣil, and that the Sāmānids appear as *mulūk al-Furs*.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibn Khallikān 1367/1948, 5:448–450. Aḥmad’s Kurds were made responsible for a number of outrageous deeds, among them the raping of hundreds of noble girls. See also Tor 2007, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:474, year 256 (III:1839); Ibn al-Athīr 1965, 7:240.

¹⁰¹ Al-Ṭabarī 1994, 9:514, year 261. Al-Iṣṭakhri presents Mūsā b. Mihrāb (not Mihrān) as leader of the Bādhinjān *ramm* of Kurds in Fārs, the most warlike group because of the horses they raised. The group lived closer to Iṣfahān than to Fārs, but their leaders owned many estates and villages in Fārs (al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 145).

¹⁰² Al-Iṣṭakhri 1870, 144.

It is possibly in this context that his conflict with prominent family members, in particular with Abū Bilāl Mirdās, can be explained. Abū Bilāl is presented as a ‘traditional’ local lord: he was prepared to act on behalf of the caliphal authorities, but not to confront the military powers, sticking to paradigms of negotiation and mediation instead. When Ibn Wāṣil started to assert himself as head of the province, he must have felt threatened, as indeed he was. If he was a senior member of the senior branch of the family, he clearly stood in Ibn Wāṣil’s way.

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil in Earlier Scholarship

Ibn Wāṣil is by no means an unknown figure. Since sources on his career have been readily available for a long time, it is no surprise that many earlier scholars have devoted lines or pages to him. In general, he appears as a lesser figure in the story of Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth and therefore has not been the subject of a detailed study until now.

Nöldeke gives a brief rendering of the main source narrative in his study of the Ṣaffārids. He (wrongly) claims that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil was already recognized as governor over Fārs by the caliphal administration in 256 H/861 CE during Ya‘qūb’s advance, and again Ibn Wāṣil appears as caliphal representative fighting Ya‘qūb after the Ṣaffār had been defeated. In all, Ibn Wāṣil is not a prominent figure and not described as a rebel.¹⁰³

Vasmer’s study on the coinage of the Ṣaffārids and their enemies in Fārs and Khurāsān not only has basic numismatic information, but also a summary of the narrative in the main chronicles, much fuller than the one found in Nöldeke. Vasmer presents Ibn Wāṣil as a powerful provincial figure, allied at some times to the caliphal side and at others to Ya‘qūb.¹⁰⁴

Bosworth strikes another note in his study on the armies of the Ṣaffārids. He touches briefly on the conquest of Sa‘īdābād, Ibn Wāṣil’s castle, by Ya‘qūb’s troops in 263 H/876 CE, and comments that it “belonged to the adventurer Muḥammad b. Wāṣil al-Ḥanzalī.” In a footnote, he asks whether this man was “the Muḥammad b. Wāṣil who had rebelled in Bust against the Ṭāhirid governor

103 Nöldeke 1892, 185–217 (193, 200, 203). Nöldeke does not quote his sources, but it is evident that his study is based on al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Athīr, and Ibn Khallikān. There is no trace of his having used al-Iṣṭakhṛī (who is not a central source for the history of the Ṣaffārids).

104 Vasmer 1930.

there.”¹⁰⁵ This is the first time that Ibn Wāṣil is categorized: he is an adventurer, and it is possible that he is a Khārijite on top of that. One has to ask whether either of these identifications is plausible. In my view, the answer has to be negative.

Muḥammad b. Wāṣil of Bust is mentioned in the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* (and apparently in no other source). His rebellion is dated to approximately 222 H/837 CE, or 33 lunar years before his Fārsī namesake makes his first appearance. In Bust, in the years preceding 222 H there had been several movements the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* classifies as uprisings, all with a more or less clear Khārijite background. In 220 H/835 CE, famine broke out due to the drying up of the Helmand river and an uprising took place. Its leader was one ‘Abdallāh al-Jabalī, and many Khārijites gathered around him. After some fighting the revolt was ended, not by a massacre but by some kind of agreement: ‘Abdallāh was even given a robe of honor. Another uprising took place under Muḥammad b. Yazīd; the source says that many of those who had dispersed (probably out of the Khārijites) gathered again. This revolt was quelled by the military and many people were killed. After further actions, the Khārijites (or at least a substantial number of them) left for Kirmān. Again, the governor did not succeed in establishing his rule at Bust on behalf of the Ṭāhirids; again, there was an uprising, this time under Muḥammad b. Wāṣil, and again, those who had previously dispersed gathered around him. (This reference to people who had earlier dispersed prompts thoughts of a Khārijite background.) Muḥammad b. Wāṣil succeeded in taking the new governor prisoner for a while, but the movement was quickly subdued.¹⁰⁶ We do not hear anything more of this Muḥammad b. Wāṣil in the context of Bust or of Sīstān in general. Should the two men be identified, as Bosworth suggests?

Bust is situated in present-day Afghanistan¹⁰⁷ in the Helmand valley, and is roughly 1,500 km (by modern road) away from Iṣṭakhr in Fārs. It belonged to Sīstān, where Khārijī movements were frequent and occurred even when Khārijism was largely extinct elsewhere. And there is not the slightest hint that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil al-Ḥanzalī of Fārs ever travelled to Sīstān, let alone led an uprising there. The time difference of 33 lunar years also speaks against this identification, if it does not preclude it.

105 Bosworth 1968, 534–554 (551), with note 75. This note has elicited a comment by L. P. Smirnova in *Istoriia Sīstana* 1974, p. 432, note 543. Smirnova claims that al-Ṭabarī has Muḥammad b. Wāṣil as a Kurdish leader from Fārs (al-Ṭabarī has nothing of the sort). She then quotes Bosworth’s attempt to identify this person with Muḥammad b. Wāṣil of Bust without taking a clear position.

106 *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* 1314/1935, 185–188, *Istoriia Sīstana* 1974, 192–193.

107 Present-day Lashkargāh-i Bāzār, see Fischer / de Planhol.

Regarding the argument of Khārijism, as I have shown above the Ḥanzali family of Fārs had a prominent record of Khārijism but their ancestors were quietists. Moreover, the family may have opted out before the early 9th century. A Khārijite past is no argument for a Khārijite present in the times of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil. The Khārijite argument regarding Muḥammad b. Wāṣil of Fārs was not prominent before Shaban's *Islamic History* of 1976. In an altogether inadequate summary of events in Fārs, he states: "It is a remarkable fact that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil was of a genuine lineage of Umayyad Khārijites who had long since settled in Iṣṭakhr in the heart of Fārs."¹⁰⁸ This is correct, as we have seen, but it does not mean what Shaban apparently wants us to believe, namely that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil was a Khārijite or a crypto-Khārijite or something of the sort, and that Khārijism was a synonym for revolt and rebellion.

Shaban's statement was taken up by Bosworth in his monograph on the *History of the Ṣaffārids and the Maliks of Nimruz*. In this work, Bosworth quotes the early Khārijite connections of the family but does not claim that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil himself had Khārijite leanings, and he does not come back to the question of whether the man in Sīstān should be identified with the man in Fārs. This book's passage on Fārs during the three-cornered struggle between the caliphal forces, the Ṣaffār, and Muḥammad b. Wāṣil is otherwise an excellent summary of what the sources tell us.¹⁰⁹

In Kennedy's textbook on the history of the caliphate, Ibn Wāṣil is briefly mentioned. Kennedy follows Bosworth: Ibn Wāṣil is "a local adventurer". He establishes a context for Ibn Wāṣil's movement and the caliphal policies in the context of the revolt of the Zanj in southern Iraq, and indeed we have seen that all the military commanders who came to Fārs to fight Ibn Wāṣil were otherwise engaged in this struggle.¹¹⁰

Gordon follows the general trend in his work on the military slaves (where, of course, the focus is not on Fārs). Tracing the career of the slave general Mūsā b. Bughā, he notes that Mūsā's forces (under the command of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muflīḥ) were defeated by "local rebel" Ibn Wāṣil.¹¹¹

Deborah Tor has most to say on the subject: she sees the Muḥammad b. Wāṣil in Bust as the same person as the Muḥammad b. Wāṣil in Fārs, and therefore she can state that when Ibn Wāṣil usurped the province (Fārs) in 256 H/870 CE, he "had a long history of disruptive behavior." She also calls him an "erst-

¹⁰⁸ Shaban 1976, 98–99.

¹⁰⁹ Bosworth 1994, 147–152.

¹¹⁰ Kennedy 2016, 153.

¹¹¹ Gordon 2001, 145.

while Khārijite” or an “at least erstwhile Khārijite” as indeed he was if he was the rebel of Bust. She does not note his background as one of the *mulūk Fārs*, nor mention the family’s Khārijite antecedents.¹¹² When she describes Ya‘qūb’s later campaign against Ibn Wāṣil that ended with the former’s victory, she tells us that “at this juncture one of the leading magnates of Fārs appealed to Ya‘qūb to save Fārs from the arbitrary rule of Muḥammad b. Wāṣil.” She omits that this magnate, Abū Bilāl Mirdās, was a relative of Muḥammad’s, and she does not give details as to how Ibn Wāṣil’s rule was arbitrary.¹¹³ Her picture of Ibn Wāṣil as a Khārijite with a long record of disruptive behavior is therefore based on an identification I think is spurious, and in order to make this dubious identification work she has to disregard all other information about Ibn Wāṣil’s background. Moreover, the identification of Khārijism with “disruptive behavior” does not do justice to the quietist (and later Ibāḍī) movement current in Khārijism.

I hope this essay has shown that Muḥammad b. Wāṣil was neither a Khārijite (if that means an irredeemable rebel) nor an adventurer. He may have been a rebel in that he ‘usurped’ power in Fārs, but at times he also was the appointed governor there on behalf of Ya‘qūb or the caliph. He was a representative of the *mulūk Fārs*, interested in safeguarding his influence, wealth, and power. Earlier research has more or less completely disregarded his family history (with only an occasional hint at its early Khārijite stages) as well as his social standing. This is a consequence of the central perspective taken by most researchers, to whom locally powerful people appear as rebels as soon as they come into conflict with the imperial center, and outright rebellion starts as soon as these local powerholders take action in defense of their own interests against the central powers. Let it be noted, however, that Bosworth came back to this question in one of his latest publications, and that in his entry “Šaffārīds” in the *Encyclopedia Iranica Online* he calls Muḥammad b. Wāṣil a “local magnate”.¹¹⁴ This coincides with the results of the present analysis.

112 Tor 2007, 130–131.

113 Tor 2007, 157.

114 Bosworth, “Šaffārīds.”

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